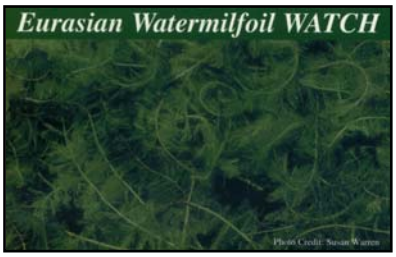
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Alpena FRO Accomplishment Report

Partnerships and Accountability

Fletcher Pond Association Evaluates Strategies to Combat Nuisance Plant



Alpena FRO Biologist Bowen participated in the February 18 meeting of the Fletcher Pond Improvement Association held at the Jesse Besser Museum in Alpena, MI. EnviroScience, Inc. President, Martin Hilovsky, gave a presentation that provided information on the use of native milfoil weevils to control nuisance Eurasian watermilfoil in lakes. Many interesting examples were provided that showed successful treatments on other local lakes. Items of discussion at the meeting included the formation of a Steering Commitee, available grants and other potential funding sources for control efforts, and the creation of an Eurasian watermilfoil exhibit for the Jesse Besser Museum. Partnerships to address threats to aquatic species and to provide effective conservation and management are an important component of the Fisheries Strategic Vision.

Anjanette K. Bowen

Michigan DNR and Service Discuss Partnership Opportunities

On February 10, staff from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) and the Service met at the Ralph A. MacMullen (RAM) Center in Roscommon, Michigan to discuss partnership opportunities. The meeting was a follow up to a coordination meeting between the two agencies in July 2003. Current efforts by the MDNR to develop River Assessments and River Management Plans could benefit from Service funding programs such as Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Fish Passage and Coastal Programs. The meeting was an opportunity for Service participants to better understand the process for development of these MDNR planning documents and an opportunity for MDNR personnel to better understand the funding processes for the identified programs. Priorities identified in the River Assessments are consistent with objectives of the Service's funding programs and could lead to much closer working relationships between the two agencies. Procedural changes were agreed upon to provide for better coordination between the two agencies. Providing overviews of the Service programs was Project Leader McClain (Alpena FRO) for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, Biologist Susan Wells (Alpena FRO) for the Fish Passage Program and Biologist Bob Kavetsky (East Lansing FO) for the Coastal Program. In addition, Project Leader Mark Holey and Biologist Stewart Cogswell from the Green Bay FRO participated for the Service. Michigan DNR was represented by Basin Coordinators Tammy Newcomb (Lake Huron), Jay Wesley (Lake Michigan), Steve Scott (Lake Superior) and Kurt Newman (Lake Erie). An overview of the Michigan DNR River

Assessment and Management planning process was provide by Jay Wesley. Development and enhancement of Partnerships with natural resource agencies are critically important to the Service and its Fisheries Vision for the Future, and to the collaborative management of fish and wildlife resources. Meetings such as this are extremely beneficial for maintaining an effective partnership between the Service and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Jerry R. McClain

NOAA Grant Will Continue Juvenile Lake Sturgeon Research in the St. Clair River

Fishery Biologist James Boase from Alpena FRO collaborated with Mike Thomas (Michigan DNR) and Professor James Diana (University of Michigan) to draft a proposal for continued juvenile lake sturgeon research in the St. Clair River. The NOAA Grant was awarded in February 2004 for the 2005 – 06 fiscal seasons to the University of Michigan and will receive matching dollars from MDNR and the University with the Service providing in-kind assistance. Biologists from Alpena FRO are currently conducting research in the St. Clair River looking at juvenile lake sturgeon movement patterns and habitat use. The project, funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), is a collaborative effort with MDNR Mt. Clemens Fishery Research Station, US Geological Survey Great Lakes Science Center, Ontario MNR Lake Huron Management Unit, and Purdy Fisheries Ltd. Funding for the NFWF grant will be exhausted by December 2004. Funding through the NOAA Grant will enable the Service to participate as a supporting member of the ongoing research taking place in the St. Clair River and will help further our understanding about the early life history of lake sturgeon in the Great Lakes. This collaborative effort provided an opportunity for the Service to expand its network of both governmental and non-governmental partners. Working with other governmental agencies and commercial fishers has been beneficial in aiding the ongoing lake sturgeon research that the Alpena FRO is currently involved with in the St. Clair River. Maintaining and the continued expansion of these networks is key to the success not only for the research that Alpena FRO is conducting in this area of the Great Lakes, but to the overall interagency effort in restoring lake sturgeon throughout the Great Lakes basin.

James C. Boase

Aquatic Species Conservation and Management

Biologist Updates Lake Huron Commercial Sturgeon Report

During the month of February Fishery Biologist Adam Kowalski compiled lake sturgeon data collected by commercial fishers in Lake Huron and updated the Alpena FRO Commercial Fishery Sturgeon Project annual report with data through 2003. Participating commercial fishers tag lake sturgeon and collect data such as tag number, total length, fork length, girth, water depth and temperature, bottom type, and capture location from lake sturgeon incidentally caught in trap nets targeting lake whitefish and yellow perch. Fishers also remove the first pectoral fin ray for ageing purposes. Previously

tagged sturgeon are released upon recapture, and all above listed data are noted. Since 1995 when the project started, commercial fishers in US waters have tagged 301 lake sturgeon in the main basin of Lake Huron. Forty-nine tagged lake sturgeon have been re-captured, and an additional 31 sturgeon have been captured, measured, and released untagged. All project data are stored at the Alpena FRO and are used to help track lake sturgeon movement in the Great Lakes and to monitor lake sturgeon recovery. This project will continue in 2004, and copies of the current year's report will be available on the Alpena FRO website. In future reports, a movement map will be produced showing lake sturgeon capture and recapture locations. This will help biologists track the movement of lake sturgeon throughout Lake Huron over the course of the project. Lake sturgeon are listed as threatened or endangered in 19 of 20 states in its original range. All commercial fishers in this program are volunteers working toward a common goal of rebuilding this native population before it requires listing under the Endangered Species Act. This program is an excellent partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the commercial fishing industry to monitor and assess the status of the Lake Huron lake sturgeon population.

Adam T. Kowalski

Aquatic Nuisance Species Work

In February, Fishery Biologist Scott Koproski began ageing scales and otoliths collected during Alpena FRO ruffe control efforts in Lake Huron from 1998-2003. Not much is known about the ruffe age composition in Lake Huron as few, if any, ruffe have been previously aged. In addition to scales and otoliths dorsal fin spines were also collected from most of the ruffe captured by the Alpena FRO, but these structures have not been analyzed yet. Biologist Koproski will obtain age composition data of the ruffe population and year class strength information from this analysis. He will also examine any differences in age estimates among the three structures with the goal of developing procedures for selecting and ageing the calcified structure that provides the most accurate age estimates for ruffe in Lake Huron. In February, Fishery Biologists Scott Koproski and Adam Kowalski also began mending 1 ½" stretch mono-filament gill nets used during the ruffe control program in Lake Huron. A total of six 100' long gill nets were fished during ruffe control efforts in 2003. One of these nets was completely destroyed, and the other 5 had significant damage to the twine itself. Koproski and Kowalski re-strung the 5 damaged nets with new twine, and the 6th net will be re-built in March. All nets will be ready to fish by the start of the sampling season in 2004. Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) pose a serious threat to native fish once they become established. ANS species typically out-compete native fish for food and preferred habitat, and in the absence of native predators their abundance can grow very quickly. Work performed during field and lab activities at the Alpena FRO helps resource agencies obtain a better understanding of ANS species like ruffe and their abundance and habitat preferences. This work also helps fulfill the Service's goal of preventing and reducing the establishment and spread of aquatic nuisance species.

Scott R. Koproski

Public Use

Career Pathway Provides Students Opportunities to Learn About Service Jobs

Alpena Community College (Alpena, Michigan) hosted a Career Pathway Night to allow high school and college students to hear first hand about activities associated with a variety of different careers. The event was sponsored by over 90 northeastern Michigan businesses, educational institutions, organizations, and private individuals. Biologist Bowen of the Alpena Fishery Resources Office provided a PowerPoint presentation on career opportunities available with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, including information on job activities and student employment programs. Over 200 students attended the event. Partnerships with other community organizations, particularly for educational purposes which enhance public use, are an important part of the Service's Strategic Fisheries Vision.

Anjanette K. Bowen

Cooperation with Native Americans

Lake Trout Stock Assessment Models Updated in 1836 Treaty Waters

Fishery Biologist Aaron Woldt of the Alpena FRO and Ji He of the Michigan DNR updated lake trout statistical-catch-at-age (SCAA) models for 1836 Treaty waters of Lake Huron. Each year the Modeling Subcommittee (MSC) of the Technical Fisheries Committee (TFC) is charged by the Year 2000 Consent Decree with updating stock assessment models for lake trout and lake whitefish in 1836 Treaty waters and producing safe harvest limits. The Year 2000 Consent Decree is a 20 year fishery allocation agreement for 1836 Treaty waters signed by the State of Michigan, United States, Bay Mills Indian Community, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, and Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians. There are two lake trout SCAA models for 1836 Treaty waters in Lake Huron. The MH-1 (north-western Lake Huron) model includes statistical district MH-1 in US waters and management area 4-1 in adjacent Canadian waters. The MH-2 (north-central Lake Huron) model includes statistical district MH-2 in US waters and management areas 4-2, 4-3, and 4-7 in adjacent Canadian waters. Woldt, along with He, added 2003 commercial harvest, recreational harvest, biological survey, and stocking data to the Lake Huron models. Woldt and He began analyzing model output, performing diagnostic tests of the models' performance, and produced preliminary 2004 harvest estimates for the state-licensed recreational fishery and the tribal commercial fishery. Woldt and He will present these preliminary model results and harvest limits at the March 16-18 meeting of the MSC. Woldt and He will perform additional model diagnostics on the Lake Huron lake trout models, make changes where necessary, and further refine the preliminary harvest limits prior to presenting these limits to the TFC on March 30. Model results from these analyses will determine 2004 lake trout harvest limits for both the state-licensed recreational fishery and the tribal commercial fishery in 1836 Treaty waters of Lake Huron. The harvest limits produced will allow fisheries to be executed while still protecting the biological integrity of the lake trout stocks. This outcome is consistent with the Service's goal of building and

maintaining self-sustaining populations of native fish species while meeting the needs of tribal communities.

Aaron P. Woldt

Leadership in Science and Technology

Alpena FRO Power Vault Tape Library

During February, Administrative Technician Debra Turner completed installation of the new Alpena FRO PowerVault tape library. This tape library device replaced the current tape backup drive. The autoloader has 7 regular tapes and 1 cleaning tape, which are automatically rotated. Tapes only need to be changed maybe once a year or as they become defective. With this new library device, the administrative overhead has been reduced. The device is less prone to failures and allows for a more trouble free management of the backup system. These upgrades are consistent with the Service's Fisheries Vision for Workforce Management.

Debra L. Turner

Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Michigan Coordinators Meeting

Assistant Project Leader Tracy Hill and Fish and Wildlife Biologist Heather Enterline attended the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program Michigan Coordinators meeting on February 9-11 at the East Lansing Private Lands Office. The purpose for the meeting was to review and update all the Michigan Coordinators on the programs accomplishments and plans for the coming year. Time was spent reviewing the Partners Program policy which has received final approval. Approval of this document will affect how the program is now operated and provides guidance that will standardize the types of data collected for each project. Other aspects of the program that were discussed include building partnerships with other habitat based programs (USDA, Ducks Unlimited, etc), how accomplishments would be reported (HabITS, ARS, etc) and opportunites to outreach the program. The last day of the meeting was spent examining the specific types of projects (stream, wetland and grassland) being conducted by the coordinators. Involvement in the Partners program allows the Alpena FRO to increase the quantity and improve the quality of aquatic and riparian habitat in northeast Michigan.

Tracy D. Hill

Huron Pines RC&D Annual Meeting

Biologist Heather Enterline attended the Huron Pines Resource, Conservation and Development (RC&D) Annual meeting held in Hillman, Michigan on February 7, 2004. The meeting was held to showcase watershed restoration projects completed in the 2003 field season, partnerships created, and general activities of the RC&D. Resource agency reports were given by a number of groups including the Michigan Department of

Environmental Quality, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Natural Resource Conservation Service, U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Enterline gave the Service report reviewing the Alpena FRO Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and Fish Passage Program's 2003 field activities, planned projects for 2004, and projects in which we have submitted for funding through a number of Service sources. The Alpena FRO is working closely with Huron Pines RC&D on a number of large projects and initiatives for the 2004 field season. Approximately 70 resource agency, local government and conservation organization personnel were updated and/or introduced to the Alpena FRO's habitat restoration programs, and grant opportunities offered through the Service.

Heather L. Enterline

Additional Funding Required for Modification of the Grayling Dam

On February 24, Biologist Wells conducted an on site inspection of the 5 foot by 50 foot steel and concrete Grayling Mill Pond Dam on the Au Sable River in Grayling Michigan as a potential Fish Passage Program project to consider for funding in 2005. The Au Sable River system is prized for its trout fishing but within the impounded area of the Grayling Mill Pond Dam water temperatures can get as high as 78 degrees Fahrenheit making the waters unsuitable for trout. The proposed project will allow improved water flow and temperatures, as well as fish passage into the headwaters of the Au Sable River. An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been completed for this project by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) to determine the impacts of the dam removal. The findings of the EA concluded "No Significant Impacts" to the system. The project is being proposed and conducted by the MDNR and Huron Pines RC&D and has been recognized as a top priority for the MDNR. A portion of the funding needed for the project has been secured but additional funding is required. Local support is strong and, if fully funded, the project is scheduled to begin in the summer of 2005. This is an example of collaboration between federal, state and local governments to enhance aquatic habitat, and will foster positive working relationships and benefit of fish and wildlife resources. This project is a priority for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources' Lake Huron Basin Team. Once this project is complete it will increase trout habitat by allowing access to 17 miles of headwater stream by brown trout and brook trout.

Susan E. Wells

Cleanup Effort in the St. Clair River Might Provide Substrate for Lake Sturgeon

In February 2004, Tim Moran, President of the environmental firm Pollutech Ltd., contacted Fishery Biologist James Boase seeking information about lake sturgeon spawning substrate to facilitate one of their cleanup site on the St. Clair River. The site is located in front of the DOW Chemical facility in Sarnia, Ontario. The chemical facility was cited for contaminants that were discharged into the river and ended up accumulating in the sediments in front of the plant. Beginning almost two years ago Pollutech was hired to remove the contaminated sediments and are now at a point of replacing the substrate with clean gravel material. In addition to the clean fine gravel being placed at the site there is the possibility that larger igneous rock material, similar to what is found at the spawning reef located two km up river, may be placed at the site. Collaborating with other sturgeon researchers from the Service, USGS Great Lakes Science Center, Michigan DNR Mt Clemens Fishery Research Station, Department of Fisheries and

Oceans Canada, and Ontario MNR Lake Huron Management Unit, Boase was able to provide a list of options and, based on the available knowledge, an approach that should provide suitable spawning substrate. If the larger spawning material is placed at the cleanup site and if lake sturgeon begin to use the new reef it would be the first instance where a mitigation process directly benefited lake sturgeon restoration efforts in the Great Lakes and resulted in a net increase in habitat critical to lake sturgeon. This event provided a unique opportunity to create new partnerships with both governmental and non-governmental agencies. Working with other governmental agencies and private corporations has been beneficial in aiding the ongoing lake sturgeon research that the Alpena FRO is currently involved with in the St. Clair River. Maintaining and the continued expansion of these networks is key to the success not only for the research that Alpena FRO is conducting in this area of the Great Lakes, but to the overall interagency effort in restoring lake sturgeon throughout the Great Lakes basin.

James C. Boase

Workforce Management

MOCC Meeting 2004

Fishery Biologist Adam Kowalski attended the annual Motorboat Operator Certification Course (MOCC) Instructors Meeting in Green Bay, WI. Meeting attendees included: Dave Wedan (Region 3 MOCC Coordinator)—LaCrosse FRO, Stewart Cogswell—Green Bay FRO, Dan Kumlin—Genoa NFH, Bill Thrune and Sherri Collins (budget)—Upper Mississippi NW&FR, Tim Peiffer and Kyle Krysiak—Marquette Biological Station, Joe Reid—Trempealeau NWR, Dave Bennett—Agassiz NWR, and Nick Rowse—Twin Cities ESFO. Instructors discussed new ideas for the class, 2004 scheduling, training for instructors, instructor materials, and GPS and Mapsource software. Some of the new ideas discussed were conducting a longer MOCC refresher/open water module combined course, extending the MOCC plus open water module class by a half day, and incorporating advanced GPS and Mapsource software into the open water courses. Instructors agreed to implement these ideas. A significant amount of time was spent scheduling 2004 courses. Instructors tentatively set course sites and dates, assigned lead and assistant instructors to each, and identified any special needs for a course. Ten MOCC courses were scheduled for 2004, including the open water and airboat modules. Eleven refresher courses were also scheduled. Continued training for open water instructors was briefly mentioned, because additional training is requested of open water instructors to further enhance boating safety knowledge. Instructors also reviewed the MOCC instruction manual to ensure there were no mistakes and that all topics were covered thoroughly. Finally, all instructors were given a brief introduction to Mapsource software. Open water instructors stayed late to receive additional training on deploying a life raft at sea. This training consisted of three hours in a pool going over the demonstration that will be given during the open water courses in 2004. MOCC instructor coordination meetings are needed to ensure that all employees in Region 3 have the opportunity to attend mandatory boat safety training. Properly trained service personnel will operate motorboats effectively, efficiently, and safely as a result of MOCC training.

Adam T. Kowalski